

09.26.07:Remarks by Lieutenant Governor at the Sacramento Press Club

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(As Prepared)

Thank you. It is an honor to be here at the Sacramento Press Club and to have the opportunity to talk to you today about the critical issues facing our state and what I believe will be an important role for me as we begin to tackle some of these pressing challenges.

Eight months ago, I took office as Lieutenant Governor because the people of California embraced my commitment to transform the Lieutenant Governor's office into a forceful advocate for every Californian.

From the very first day I took office, I have focused my efforts on three critical areas that I believe will build a stronger, more vibrant and sustainable California - Climate Change, Healthcare and Higher Education.

I promised to restore the luster to this office, be a champion of the environment, be relentless in the battle to improve our kids' education, unyielding in the fight for healthcare for all; and zealous in promoting the creation of new, high wage jobs and protecting the rights of working families.

I promised to be creative in developing solutions to our state's problems and in developing common sense policies that make life better for all Californians.

I am proud to say that 262 days after taking office, working with the Governor and the leadership of this great state, I am well on the way to keeping my commitments to the state of California.

On the environmental front, I have aggressively used my position as chair of the State Lands Commission and as a member of the Ocean Protection Council to enact policies that will protect and preserve California's environment and combat global warming - most notably, I led the State Lands Commission to reject the proposed LNG terminal off the Oxnard/Malibu coast. At my first meeting of the Ocean Protection Council my leadership changed the council from talk to action, by sponsoring the five bills to reduce ocean pollution from plastic trash.

Working with Governor Schwarzenegger we have rebuilt the Commission for Economic Development As Chair I am directing our focus on building a sustainable growth economy and expanding career technical education in our schools and community colleges. Directing our focus on this area is essential to our economy, and quite literally, to the survival of our planet. Our state can and must rise to the challenge, if we are to maintain our leadership role in the global marketplace.

We all know that along with job creation, health care is critical to our future. I'm fortunate to have spent more than 30 years looking at the health care crisis from a variety of perspectives -- as a legislator, as a health insurance regulator, and now as the chair of the Commission for Economic Development.

I have a first hand understanding of how the industry works to minimize risk, limit benefits and maximize profits and premiums. I have been working with the Governor's staff and legislators on this important matter and I will continue the fight to ensure that California's health care system leaves not one person "Priced Out" of the care they need.

It goes without saying that our healthcare system is in a death spiral and it's high time we create a system that puts patients ahead of profits and ensures every Californian access to high quality health services.

I've jumped into my new role as Lieutenant Governor with the same vigor that I've approached every public office I've held in my 32-year career, and with the same philosophy that's guided my career in public service: that solving problems requires bringing people together.

I take great pride in my position as the elected representative of all Californians on the UC board of Regents and CSU Board of Trustees. I've attended every session of these important bodies and I've kept my promise to the people of California by demanding transparency in executive compensation, reasonable salaries for faculty and opposing the

ongoing tuition increases that have raised tuition 94% since 2002 and have slammed the doors of our universities on so many students.

I intend to remain focused on these essential issues, as both a UC Regent and CSU Trustee and as the chair of the CED, to better define the critical role these institutions play in our economy.

One of my first priorities as Lieutenant Governor has been to focus on the role our educational system has in workforce and economic development. Tomorrow I will conduct my eighth CSU campus Listening Tour, at Sacramento State. I've listened and learned as I've sat down with students, faculty, staff, business and labor leaders on the campuses of San Bernardino, Fresno, Bakersfield, Cal State LA, Cal Poly SLO and Pomona, and Cal State East Bay.

I've come away with two strong conclusions:

The CSU system is a critical part of maintaining and growing California's economy and our key to our social fabric. CSU catapults students whose parents never dreamed of going to college into careers as engineers, lawyers and business professionals. It is the critical piece of the training pipeline for our work force. And it is the fuel our businesses need to thrive now and in the decades ahead. I've been amazed by the stories our students have told me about the dramatic ways education has improved their lives, and I've been awed by the tremendous commitment of our talented faculty. I've also come away saddened to see that CSU, the largest university system in our nation, is in critical condition unable to adequately meet the challenge of educating our work force. Our state is short on teachers, nurses, thousands of engineers, and many other skilled positions.

I have a vested interest in the strength of our CSU system, not just because I sit on the Board, and not just because I have six children and nine grandchildren, but because of my key role as chair the California Commission for Economic Development. I know that without a strong CSU, my job as the head of our state's economic development body will be nearly impossible.

The Public Policy Institute of California issued an alarming report stating that California's higher education system will not be able to produce enough college graduates to keep the California economy growing. Specifically, today in California we have a shortage of qualified registered nurses, which leaves thousands of critical positions unfilled, even after allowing for foreign-trained nurses to fill many positions. To compound the problem, our colleges and universities don't have the capacity to educate enough nurses for today's needs, much less the ever-growing demand as our population ages.

California is 12th in the nation in the number of adults 25 and older who have college degrees and we have fallen behind other states like New York, Massachusetts, and Washington.

The report also found that our state colleges and universities are not producing enough graduates to fill the demands of California businesses.

Of the 4.5 million jobs that will be available by 2025, 3.5 million will require a minimum of a bachelor degree.

That's why as your Lieutenant Governor, one of my top priorities has been to strengthen the CSU system, and this is how I will continue:

Partner with businesses and California's Community Colleges to address the critical need for career and technical education that has the potential to provide every California student with the foundation for a good job and a hopeful future.

Partner with students, faculty and CSU leadership to build a groundswell of support for increased investment in our state colleges and universities. Just as the state invests in highways, and our infrastructure - Investment in the CSU is an intellectual and economic investment in our future.

I will bring together the CSU, the UC and the California Commission for Economic Development to develop a workforce plan for the future - one that will meet the need of business, labor, and students.

To restore the luster of our California State University system will no doubt be a challenge, but it can be done.

Time and time again, when our state has been faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges, leaders on both sides of the aisle have come together to craft real solutions that are worthy of our people.

I've had the opportunity to see many of these solutions come together first hand.

As the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, I was privileged to negotiate the Headwaters Forest Agreement, conduct the Cal-Fed water negotiations, put an end to the dumping of nuclear waste in the California Desert, and participate in development of the American agenda for the Kyoto Climate conference.

As Insurance Commissioner, I brought business and labor together to write the Road Map to Reform for the workers' compensation system, which ultimately led to a 65% reduction in the cost of claims.

As Lieutenant Governor, I am committed to working with the Governor, the Legislature, academic, business and labor leaders to make California golden once again.

We've done it before, we can do it again, and we must do it again.

- Lt. Governor Garamendi